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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JUDAISM FOR THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE.

It is, perhaps, not inopportune to discuss the question as to the significance of Judaism at the present time. Certainly it is a problem which must engage the attention of Jewish thinkers, who cannot live spiritually from hand to mouth, but must desire to account to themselves why they are Jews, and why they remain within the pale of Judaism. Merely regarding it as one of the religious beliefs which are significantly enough called the ruling creeds—quite apart from its rights of primogeniture—the question as to its right to further existence is not a superfluous one. We live in an age of criticism, a fact which some deplore, others praise, and thus every branch of knowledge which claims any rank in the hierarchy of science must justify itself by showing whether it takes a part in general culture, or is an indispensable factor in the intellectual and moral development of humanity, or contributes somewhat to the totality of human effort; or, on the other hand, whether it forms only an isolated, and perhaps moribund, member in the social organism, with an existence only permitted as a matter of custom. Theology itself is required to prove its right to live. Divinity, which in earlier times stood at the summit of all the sciences, held them under control, and defined their place, holds that lofty position no longer; and even if it still takes the first rank in some academic circles, it owes that apparent advantage only to the past, and to a regard for seniority. It must itself recognise that it has no longer any right to the title of queen of sciences. Even philosophy, that claimed the precedence in the last century, must now lay aside royal privilege in favour of the exact sciences. The more cultivated classes who have tasted of the tree of knowledge live no longer in a state of *naïve* faith, ready to accept all that theology teaches as truth, that requires no proof and brings certain salvation. Criticism, which once only whispered its doubts, or was forced to keep silent if it spoke too loud, has nowadays become bold and arrogant. It has usurped the throne, and summoned all the sciences to its

court; it tests all means of ascertaining truth, and allows nothing to pass approved which cannot be rigorously tried or ascertained by facts, or numbers, or undoubted records.

It is true that the ruling religion is not much affected by the attacks of criticism. Although some cultured persons stand in a critical or sceptical attitude towards it, and turn their back on it, it does not find its position very precarious so long as a numerous following, above and below, remain true. Among the upper classes religion is carefully preserved as a means of power even more than ever, at least among the empires of the Continent. Religion has become the close ally of the state, and therefore finds in the state an unassailable support. Among the lower classes, whose powers of thought are poorly developed, and entirely directed to the satisfaction of their present needs, it has still the majority on its side. The ruling religion, whether Catholic or Protestant, United or Orthodox Greek, does not trouble itself about its continued existence, and does not find it necessary to establish scientifically its right to live. This is not even necessary in America, where Rationalism or Atheism has founded a kind of opposition Church of incredulity. The ruling religion has an overwhelming majority, and can rest satisfied with that. Possession gives it nine points of the law.

But how about Judaism? It has no outward means of maintaining itself. It has no hold on the political powers. No minority is so weak as one whose members are scattered through all parts of the world, and live disconnected from one another. Besides this, Judaism has numerous enemies both within and without its ranks. The external opponents who contest its right to existence are by no means its most dangerous enemies.

In consequence of the tragic fate that befell its adherents, who had for centuries to wander here and there in degrading slavery, Judaism has itself adopted a garb which is by no means especially attractive, but which, as a whole, unlike some of its entirely emancipated followers, it has scarcely the power or wish to remove. And yet, notwithstanding this in nowise brilliant exterior, it demands from its adherents more earnest and serious sacrifices than any other religion, though these duties appear to many as externalities—obsolete survivals of a sad past which should be rather laid aside than preserved. The modern finery which the Reforming party in Judaism has introduced into the synagogue and public life has had no influence on that side of Jewish life which has not a synagogal or a ritual character, viz.: on married life, on the family, and on the home; these because they are

matters of conscience, and find their strength in the affections, cannot be so easily transformed. Rigid conservatives say of ritual matters: "*Sint ut sunt aut non sint.*" And it is just on this side of Judaism, in its ritual, that scepticism, not to say scorn, makes its appearance among those who have lost their respect for the past, for criticism is much more sharp and incisive among Jews than elsewhere. Now criticism in Judaism is confined to the cultured, and makes them indifferent to the heritage of many thousand years, if it does not make them despise it. These inner enemies of Judaism are, so far, more dangerous than the others, because the latter, except the rabid anti-semitic *Judenfresser*, who cast scorn on Moses and the Prophets, at any rate show their respect for Jewish antiquities. The opponents of Judaism among its own sons banish all reverence for the long roll of their ancestral heroes of intellect and martyrs of faith. How can Judaism maintain itself if its most distinguished sons, the cultured classes, turn their back on it? Or shall the word of the prophet find fulfilment: "A poor and lowly people shall be left in the midst of thee?" And the fidelity of these lowly ones is not quite assured. They as a rule urge their children to adopt the culture of the time, and these in their turn strive to obtain equality and social position by means of scientific ability. This is the case where Jews exist in large numbers, as in Germany, Austria, Russia and its dependencies, Roumania and the Balkan principalities; this striving after European forms of culture, in its way so praiseworthy, has spread even to the Turkish Orient, and has crossed over into Africa. It is encouraged by the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and by the Anglo-Jewish Association. In two generations there must be a relative increase in the numbers, if not of Apostates, at least of Indifferents. How shall the existence of Judaism continue?

Or will it have no further existence? Has it already fulfilled its mission, and is it no longer anything but a ghost longing for the rest of the grave? Must it withdraw from the scene of practical influence because the civilizing element in it has passed over into the general atmosphere of culture, and its principles have become an integral part of public law and justice? Has it done its duty, and may it now retire from the stage?

The question of the function of Judaism in the present and the future has become a burning and vital question for cultivated Jews. Is the ancestral heritage so valuable that for its sake one should put up with a despised position in life, and for ever submit to the ban which the intolerance of Central and Eastern Europe has imposed on the adherents of

Judaism? Is it worth while taking up a martyrdom not alone for oneself but for one's children? It is true the Jews in the most civilised lands, in which the principles of liberty have been carried out to their full consequences—*i.e.*, in England, France, and also in Italy—are more fortunate; they do not suffer any loss through their religion, whether political or social. But Judaism requires even from them sacrifices, if not of a material nature, still sacrifices of blissful sentiments and yearnings.

Readiness of sacrifice for an ideal can only be inspired by the most strenuous conviction of its truth and excellence. But how shall the present generation become possessed of such a conviction? It has grown sceptical under the influence of the exact sciences, and only lays weight on figures and facts.

Perhaps it may be possible to gain such a conviction of the importance of Judaism even at the present day without forsaking the firm ground of actuality. It may be possible to produce proofs that Judaism has pre-eminent value, just because it rests on the solid basis of actual phenomena, and can therefore look forward to the future with equanimity, and needs no material power. It may perhaps be demonstrated that its ideal mission, its capacity of fruitfulness, which is even more or less allowed by its external opponents, and its power of transformation, still continue and must continue. This necessity is easy to recognise if one clearly understands, on the one hand, the essence of Judaism and its characteristic qualities, by which it is distinguished from other forms of religion; and if, on the other hand, one compares with these the prevailing ethical and religious tone, as manifested in society and in the life of the individual.

In order not to mistake the essential characteristics of Judaism, one must not regard it as a *faith*, or speak of it as "the Jewish faith." The application of a word is by no means unimportant. The word often becomes a net in which thought gets tangled unawares. From an ecclesiastical standpoint, the word "faith" implies the acceptance of an inconceivable miraculous fact, insufficiently established by historical evidence, and with the audacious addition, *Credo quia absurdum*. Judaism has never required such a belief from its adherents. When it is said that religion stands in fierce conflict with science or with reason, that only applies to forms of religion whose dogmas and the foundation of whose institutions rest on unprovable facts, which faith alone has raised to certainty. Such a faith must naturally be engaged in an internecine struggle with science.

But Judaism is not a mere doctrine of faith. What is it

then ? The celebrated and original French historian Renan, who often gives expression to striking *aperçus*, though he has never entirely freed himself from the memories of priest-craft, has said of Judaism that it is "a minimum of religion." This *aperçu* sounds rather curiously when one thinks of the huge folios which contain the Jewish religious codices, the Talmud and its addenda, Maimonides' *Mishne Thorah* or Caro's *Shulchan Aruch*, with their commentaries and super-commentaries, which offer a boundless extent of religious duties. And yet Renan's utterance is true, as true in reality as it is concisely expressed. It hits the mark not only in the sense that Judaism demands few, or no articles of faith, but also in the sense that its centre of gravity is not to be found in the religious sphere. What then is its essence ? It has been characterised often enough, and yet misconceived by friend and foe, as much misconceived as if it were an esoteric mystery or a coarse superstition. When the king of Judah and his people were carried away by such a misconception that they even brought human sacrifices in imitation of foreigners, the prophet Micah said : "Thou askest what the Lord requireth of thee ? Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." That is a minimum of religion, is it not ? Similarly, 700 years later, the great Hillel characterised it to a heathen who had asked him what was the quintessence of Judaism : "'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' That is the whole of the law ; all the rest is but commentary on this text." So too, 150 years later, an authoritative council also reduced the fundamental duties of Judaism to a minimum. The Emperor Hadrian, who in his own lifetime ordered his worship as a God, had decreed a terrible religious persecution on all the Jews of the Roman Empire, as a punishment for the way in which the Jews of Palestine had fought for liberty and still higher possessions against the Roman legions. The least display of a religious symbol or the slightest sign of religion was to be met by corporal punishment, or even by death. By this means, Judaism was to be driven from the hearts of its adherents, and uprooted from the memory of men. Under these sad circumstances, the Rabbis of the time came together in council in order to provide the people with a rule of conduct. Though they were themselves prepared to undergo a martyr's death for every single precept, yet they did not require the same degree of self-sacrifice from the whole of Israel. In this mournful condition of affairs, the Council of Lydda made a well-weighed distinction between the fundamental provisions

of Judaism and those that merely applied to the ritual. The latter might, under certain circumstances, be transgressed, in order to avoid punishment; but the former, on the other hand, must not be denied even for fear of death in its most horrible shape. The council reduced the fundamental principles of Judaism to three: avoidance of idolatry, avoidance of unchastity, and, finally, avoidance of an attack on human life.

It is easy enough to perceive from all this that Prophets and Talmudists did not regard sacrifice or ritual as the fundamental and determining thing in Judaism, but another and higher element, or, more rightly speaking, two elements which apparently do not belong to one another, but are in reality radically interdependent. We must, to a certain extent, analyse these elements, in order to recognise and to formulate their fundamental constituents. Both elements have a positive and a negative side; the one element is ethical, the higher ethics, including in its positive aspects, love of mankind, benevolence, humility, justice, and in its negative aspects, respect for human life, care against unchastity, subdual of selfishness and the beast in man, holiness in deed and thought. The second element is religious, and in it the negative side is predominant, to worship no transient being as God, whether belonging to the animal kingdom, the race of men, or the heavenly world, and in general to consider all idolatry as vain and to reject it entirely. The positive side is to regard the highest Being as one and unique, and as the essence of all ethical perfections, and to worship it as the Godhead—in a single word, Monotheism in the widest acceptation of the term. The ethical is so far intimately connected with the religious element, because the divine perfection gives the ideal for the moral life. "Be ye holy even as I am holy," is the perpetually recurring refrain in the oldest records of Judaism. On the other hand, idolatry leads to debased acts and feelings, as the history of the world has conclusively proved in the coarsest fashion. The worship of paganism was for the most part orgiastic. If Zeus is a god, licentiousness is no sin. If Aphrodite is a goddess, chastity cannot be a virtue.

To Biblical critics it would be superfluous to prove that these two elements, the ethical in its richness and the religious in its purity, are the fundamental principles of Judaism. The Law, the Prophets, and the other books of the Canon, are full of them. They force themselves on the notice of every reader of the Bible, and the verses which speak of them require no interpretation. The Prophets directed their burning eloquence essentially against transgression of

either element, against vice and against idolatrous worship. They rarely touch on ritual problems. Even in the Decalogue, the foundation of Judaism, the commandments apply to the two elements, and only a single one, the sanctification of the Sabbath, has a ritual character. In Deuteronomy even the Sabbath is based on an ethical principle, viz., that the man-servant and maid-servant may also enjoy rest. The prophet Jeremiah positively depreciated sacrifice, for he makes God say: "I did not enjoin sacrifice at the Exodus from Egypt." The prophets Amos and Hosea establish the same principle, that sacrifice—the chief element in the culture of ancient peoples—and, therefore, that ritual, was of subordinate importance.

The foundation of Judaism has accordingly rested on these two elements since its first revelation. This truth cannot be too often repeated or made known too widely, for it has often been misunderstood and is still misunderstood at the present day. It is the characteristic of Judaism and is its essential difference from all other forms of religion. A profound French thinker and historian, Eugène Burnouf, has demonstrated that no religion, not even Christianity, in its initial stages lays stress on ethics or the theory of morals as being involved in religion. Only gradually does religion become humanised, so to speak, *i.e.*, bring morality within its fold. Classic paganism at first failed to recognise the ethical element and when Marcus Aurelius and Julian the Apostate realised its worth and desired to introduce it into the Roman religious world, it was too late. Christianity was originally only faith and only made ethics its aim after a long development, and then simply because it was a child of Judaism. To the sharp eye of criticism the ethical element, which was added later, is easily to be distinguished from the original dogmatism. The mechanical mixture of the two elements shows its artificial nature. What has the belief that Jesus is the Christ to do with "Christian Charity"? They belong to different orders of thought.

It is not so in Judaism. In it the ethical element and the pure worship of God are clearly the earliest data. Abraham is selected by God as the father of many nations so that he might teach his house and his descendants to keep God's way, to exercise kindness and justice. Thus it is written in the very first book of Holy Writ. The "way of God," or "knowledge of God," is nothing more nor less than what we term "humanity," or morality in the widest extent of the word. That is the essence of Judaism, and does not stand in any conflict with reason or with science. It does not affect this foundation in the slightest whether criticism explains the

stories and miracles of the Scriptures as legends and poetic ornaments or not.

Can this doctrine—Judaism describes itself by this name rather than as faith or as religion, *i.e.*, cultus composed of sacrifice and ritual—can this doctrine, which has worked as an elevating, sanctifying, and enfranchising element for thousands of years, have lost its influence? The religions which have been born in its bosom have only taken a part of the blessings with which this original teaching is gifted. I will only refer to one. The inequality of property threatens to subvert the very foundations of society, and the difficulties cannot be removed from the world by means of force. Judaism suggests a means of avoiding this precipice, a means deduced from its ethical principles. It does not despise mammon, and does not imagine that the rich man cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. It recognises that individual possession is justified, but it sanctifies it by demanding that it should be used and applied in a moral way, and thus overcomes the egoism of possession. It is true that the statutes of the law relating to the sabbatical and jubilee years, in which debts were released in a fixed cycle, and the ordinance that the products of the earth should be accessible to all, even to the penniless—these enactments are not applicable to the economic circumstances of the present day in the same form. But if the ethical principle underlying these laws were always borne in mind and were properly carried out, so that, *e.g.*, the soil of the United Kingdom should not be monopolised by 200,000 owners, but the remaining 35,000,000 inhabitants should also have some small rights in it, this recognition would, at any rate, do something to soften the ever-increasing bitterness of the indigent against the accumulation of riches. On this principle institutions might be established which might avert the chaos with which the European states are threatened. The tender care for the poor which the laws of the Torah, that is, of Judaism, display in regard to the harvests and the tithes, which were only to the narrowest extent adopted by Christianity, might also be applied to modern circumstances. If Judaism disappeared, the ethical postulates which it includes, and on which the continuance of society and civilisation depend, would disappear also.

More urgently necessary still is the continued existence of Judaism at present and in the future for the preservation of the religious principle. In the strictest sense, absolute monotheism, as Judaism has revealed it, is rationalism; it is the negation of all the absurdities by which the religious views and the cultus of the ancient nations were dominated.

But it required a high stage of cultivated intelligence to arrive at the conviction that the gross fetiches, the deities of wood and stone, that Baal and even Zeus, who stood under the power of Atè, that Jupiter, whose grave was shown in Crete, that Thor with his hammer, that all these gods, and even the luminaries of day and night, were not divine beings, that the goddess of love, under the names Astaroth, Mylitta, Beltis, Aphrodite, Venus, and the worship of Priapus were abominations (הוועכר), as Judaism called them. Idolatry, which sanctified immorality, only appears absurd and abominable to the present generation because Jewish rationalism has for centuries arrayed itself against it; because the prophets, with their burning language, struggled against it, because the Jewish Sibyl and the Book of Wisdom, Philo and Josephus and other Jewish thinkers made this offspring of mad fancy food for laughter. The worship of the emperors lasted on even into Christian times, *i.e.*, the emperors, even the most vicious of them, were *divi*, and had to have sacrifices brought to them. The ruling creed is likewise anthropolatry; cathedrals, cloisters, and pilgrims' shrines are dedicated to it. The only defenders of true monotheism, in other words, of rationalism in religion are still the adherents of Judaism. From Zion went forth this rationalistic teaching.

How stands the matter at the present time? Rationalism, which seeks to distinguish the ethical from the mystical in religion, which was all powerful in the last century, and in Germany had no less patrons than the philosophical King Frederick and the king of poets, Lessing, this rationalism has altogether lost its potency in that country, and has become powerless there. The leading spirits in religion scorn rational thought with such audacity that any opposition is despised as heresy. In France the upper classes are either intensely bigoted, or they become atheists in order to avoid becoming clericalists. In England there has arisen a tendency towards Ritualism with a Roman Catholic tinge, because no place is allowed to rationalism in the sphere of religion.

Thus Judaism, which is throughout rationalistic, is the sole stronghold of free thought in the religious sphere. Its mission, to overcome erroneous belief, is far from being fulfilled. There are still enough phantoms in the temples of the nations and in the hearts of men which are by no means innocuous. Millions of men still recognise a representative vicar of God on earth, whose words they credulously accept as an infallible oracle. Such phantoms, to which even the most civilised peoples on earth continue to pray, can only be banished by Judaism, as it destroyed the altars of Baal and Astarti, of Zeus and Aphrodite, and hewed down the trees of Woden and Friga

—for the inspiration came from Judaism, though the agents were Christian iconoclasts. The visionary images which becloud thousands of minds and produce the maddest enthusiasms can only be dispersed by that pure idea of God formulated by Judaism. Rationalism has no other representative but Judaism.

Regarded from this point of view, Judaism has still the same importance for the present and for the future, as it had in the past. Its mission is on this side by no means superfluous. We Jews are the representatives of Judaism and its mission; its ideas and principles pulsate in our veins. If the apostles of the pure monotheistic idea had been destroyed in their conflicts with Assyrians, Chaldæans, Greeks and Romans, the madness of idolatry, with its orgiastic forms of worship, would still exist to-day, and the civilisation of Europe would not have developed itself.

But even on the ethical side Judaism still gives example and impulse. There has been a certain phrase formulated about carrying out practical Christianity. If this phrase is to have any sense, it can only mean that morality should penetrate the institutions of the State; Judaism preached this doctrine thousands of years ago. The ethical principles which it lays to heart were not alone to be carried out by individuals, but were to become the leading principles of government. They had not only to be written on the doors of houses, but at the gates of cities. The King was always to carry with him the Book of the Law, which put the essence of Judaism in the short sentences, "Thou shalt love one God with all thy heart," and "There shall be no poor in thy cities." Methods were also indicated in this Book which might realise the ethico-religious ideals.

Thus Judaism is the source alike of humanity, of monotheism, and of religious rationalism. It has still its function to play, its mission to fulfil, in bringing these ideals to reality. If it vanished from the world, if its adherents, one and all, deserted it, there would be wanting a mighty factor for the progress of ethical and religious civilisation; it would be wanting now, just as much as it would have been wanting of old, if Judaism had disappeared before the rise of Christianity.

Of course, Judaism contains an elaborate ritual besides these ideal principles, which, unfortunately, owing to the tragic course of history, has developed into a fungoid growth which overlays the ideals. But originally the ritual in its pure form had its justification, and was intended to surround and protect ideal sin themselves of an ethereal nature. It must be reserved for a later article to explain the manner in which the ritual was adapted to the ideal.

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